

ABSTRACT  
SOCIAL WORK

BERNARD, ERICA LaSHAWN

B.A. Wake Forest University

AN EXAMINATION OF SKIN TONE PREFERENCES AMONG BLACK SCHOOL CHILDREN

Advisor: Melvin Williams, Ph.D.

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Skin tone preferences and racial identification processes of children have been researched for many years. In this descriptive study, the skin tone preferences of 50 Black school children were examined. By using the Mean and Standard Deviation scores, it was concluded that factors such as gender, skin color, and self concept may influence a child's skin tone preference, while age would not. Understanding the influence skin tone bias has upon children may help social workers and other mental health professionals implement educational programs which allow African American children enhance and maintain high self concept levels.

AN EXAMINATION OF SKIN TONE PREFERENCES  
AMONG BLACK SCHOOL CHILDREN

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ERICA LaSHAWN BERNARD

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R.V. T.55

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## PREFACE

What shall I tell my children who are black,  
Of what it means to be a captive in this dark skin?

What shall I tell my dear ones, the fruit of my womb,  
Of how beautiful they are when everywhere they turn,  
They are faced with hatred of everything that is black?

Villains are black with black hearts,  
A black cow gives no milk,  
A black hen lays no eggs.  
Bad news comes bordered in black.  
Mourning clothes are black,  
Black is evil, evil is black and devil's food cake is black,  
All that is bad is black.

What shall I tell my dear ones who are raised in a white  
world,  
A place where white has been made to represent  
All that is good and pure and fine and decent,  
Where clouds are white, and dolls, and heaven  
And heaven sure is a white, white place  
With angels robed in white, and cotton candy,  
And ice cream and milk and ruffled Sunday dresses,  
And dream houses and long sleek Cadillacs,  
And angel's food cake is white. All that is good is white.

What can I say therefore when my black child  
Comes home to me in tears, frustrated and rejected  
Because a playmate, identical to him  
Has called him black, big lipped, flatnosed and nappy  
headed?

I hope he will feel strengthened and reassured  
When I dry his tears and whisper,  
"Yes, that's true. You are black,  
And you are just as worthwhile and dear as anyone."...

-Margaret Taylor Burroughs



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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

As African Americans attempt to shape a new identity and gain control over the factors which most profoundly affect their lives and destiny, they are confronted with an immense hurdle—a system of white institutional racism—a system which continuously perpetuates a saga of racial stereotypes used to justify oppression of African Americans. Even though extensive groups of recognized African American leaders are constantly reiterating to their youths that Black is beautiful; white society is steadily repeating black equals anything that is evil, bad, or ugly, and it will always be less desirable than white.<sup>1</sup>

In 1947 Kenneth and Mamie Clark suggested that while most nursery school children could correctly distinguish between their race, "Negro or colored," and the white race; the Black child's awareness of these differences did not necessarily illustrate "a socially accurate perception of racial self-identification."<sup>2</sup> The Clarks found when compared, white children made more correct racial self identifications than African American children of the

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<sup>1</sup>James Banks and Jean Grambs. Black Self Concept Implications for Education and Social Science (New York: MCGraw Hill Press, 1947), 7.

<sup>2</sup>Kenneth Clark and Mamie Clark. "Racial Identification and Preference in Negro Children." Readings In Social Psychology (New York: MCGraw Hill Press, 1947), 169.

same age. These preferences suggest to some that African American children may be unwilling to accept their heritage.

"...it is possible...that the relative inaccuracy of Negro identifications reflects not simple ignorance of self but unwillingness or psychological inability to identify with African American because the child wants to look white".<sup>3</sup>

Others conclude

"These young children's doll choices indicate an incipient racial attitude which can be accounted for by rejection or ambivalence toward their own race."<sup>4</sup>

Have past studies been accurate to infer that when given a preference, Black children prefer to play with white dolls because of stagnated identity formation or are earlier reports of ethnocentric depreciation reflections of the psycho-social climate of the period?<sup>5</sup> Should these preferences be attributed to this deficiency and to other factors such as the child's environment, or their attempts to adhere to the norms of social desirability?

#### Statement of the Problem

Over forty years ago in developmental studies of Black children's racial identification preference patterns

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<sup>3</sup>James Banks and Jean Grambs. Black Self Concept Implications for Education and Social Science (New York: MCGraw Hill Press, 1972), 8.

<sup>4</sup>Clifford L. Moore. "The Racial Preference and Attitude of Preschool Black Children." The Journal of Genetic Psychology 129 (1976): 37.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 37.

the Clark and Clark study reported by the age of five, children understand to be Black in America means to be inferior.<sup>6</sup> These children have also accepted White society's "truth" that they are inferior, because they lack Anglo-Saxon features which represent beauty. When studied, not only do these African American children reject the doll they should identify with, 67% of the children preferred the white doll, 59% rejected the black doll, but also attach negative characteristics to it, 59% viewed the white doll more positively, while 59% viewed the black doll more negatively.<sup>7</sup>

Whether written as a child's poem, featured in lay materials, documented in historical context, or presented in landmark trials, issues of skin tone consciousness, discrimination and biased treatment have always been present throughout the African American experience. For example, during the slave epochs, the light skinned children who were the results of "master/slave" relations were given more privileges than the darker slave children. Another interesting occurrence relating to differential treatment due to skin tone bias behavior is African Americans rejection of their racial group and the identification with

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<sup>6</sup>Kenneth Clark and Mamie Clark. "What Do Blacks Think of Themselves?" Ebony (November 1980): 176.

<sup>7</sup>Clifford L. Moore. "The Racial Preferences and Attitudes of Preschool Black Children." The Journal of Genetic Psychology 129 (1976): 37

the reference group, the majority group.<sup>8</sup> This occurrence usually manifests itself through the adoption of the dominant group's standards and values of beauty. These (Caucasian) standards of beauty are not only the most desirable characteristics to possess, but they represent wealth, poise, and status. These reference group ideals can be seen in campus beauty queens, most of which are very light skinned and have long, straight hair<sup>9</sup>; mate selection, most black males prefer spouses who possess Caucasian features in comparison to African features<sup>10</sup>; and connotations about skin color and hair, such as "high-yellow", "cream-colored", "bad" and "good" hair (kinky African and straight Caucasian hair).<sup>11</sup>

The adaptation of these ideals can not only cause damage to African American's self concept, but cause bias and discrimination among the race.<sup>12</sup> An excellent example of this is the case of *Morrow vs The Internal Revenue*

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<sup>8</sup>William E. Cross. "Black Identity: Rediscovering the Distinction Between Personal Identity and Reference Group Orientation." Beginnings: The Social and Affective Development of Black Children, Margaret B. Spencer, Geraldine K. Brookins, and Walter R. Allen. (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Press, 1985), 155.

<sup>9</sup>Ronald E. Hall. "Bias Among African-Americans Regarding Skin Color: Implications for Social Work Practice." Research on Social Work Practice 2, 4 (October 1992), 480.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 481.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 479.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 480.

Service. In 1990 in the Federal District Court of Atlanta, Tracy Morrow alleged her supervisor discriminated against her because of her skin color. Ironically, both Ms. Morrow and her supervisor are African Americans; Ms. Morrow is light skinned, her supervisor is dark.

Hall states, according to James Baldwin, skin color is the cause of most difficulties in the lives of African Americans. Issues such as self concept, earnings, and job placement may also be affected by skin color. For example, lighter skinned African Americans tend to pursue higher education, be employed in higher status occupations, and be more socially mobile than darker skinned people.<sup>13</sup>

Biases toward certain skin tones may indicate an opportunity for social or self concept problems to arise later in life. Early detection of these problems may alert social workers and other professionals of the need to implement programs which enhance the self concept levels of children and possibly prevent address the possibilities of other social problems developing later in life.

In a society where Black represents all that is ugly, bad, or evil, racial awareness and attitudes begin in early childhood and can affect a child's their ideas and behaviors throughout their lives.<sup>14</sup> At one time, the rate in which

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 480.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 479.

Black children were rejecting themselves was steadily increasing as a result of being faced with opposing forces of negative ideas, self-image, rejection, ambivalence, concepts of self-esteem and racial identity, all of these forces usually gave rise to the need for self-esteem, concept and acceptance.<sup>15</sup> Even though these forces are still present in today's society, African American parents instill positive images of their race in their children which cause the rate of self rejection to decrease.<sup>16</sup> With early intervention of these negative ideas and images towards African Americans, our children will continue to renounce the white doll even though it supposed to be a "nice color" and we can prevent or eliminate any biases which may develop.

#### Purpose of the Study

The following study assessed whether African American children have imposed biases on themselves regarding skin color<sup>17</sup>; or had the recent rejuvenation of African American pride and awareness amended African

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<sup>15</sup>Kenneth B. Clark. Prejudice and Your Child. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 18.

<sup>16</sup>Kenneth B. Clark and Mamie Clark. "What Do Blacks Think of Themselves?" Ebony (November 1980): 180.

<sup>17</sup>Ronald E. Hall. "Bias Among African-Americans Regarding Skin Color: Implications for Social Work Practice." Research on Social Work Practice 2, 4 (October 1992), 482.



American's thoughts about their skin tones?<sup>18</sup> In order to do this, the skin tone preferences of African American school children were explored.

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<sup>18</sup>W. Curtis Banks. "White Preference Behavior in Blacks: A Paradigm in Search of a Phenomenon." Psychological Bulletin 83, 6 (1976), 1180.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Children's racial preferences, ethnic and racial identification processes have been themes of continuous interest among researchers. A commonly used procedure for studying these preferences has been presenting the child with dolls which are representative of the child's racial group and of the majority group. The literature consists of studies which discuss children's preferences, the reasons for them, and the deficits of earlier studies.

In 1939, Horowitz became the pioneer of investigating children's self identification and racial preferences, prior to this date, very few studies had been performed to research this phenomenon. Horowitz researched Black and White nursery school children in order to determine their ideas about themselves and their identification processes. In order to discover how children identify themselves, Horowitz administered two tests, the Choice Test and the Portrait Series Test. The results indicated the Black children were able to make more correct self-identifications than the white children, concluding Black children realize that skin color is a factor of differentiation and similarities between groups.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ruth E. Horowitz. "Racial Aspects of Self-Identification in Nursery School Children." The Journal of Psychology 7 (1976): 99

In the same year another study was performed by Kenneth and Mamie Clark. Using Black nursery school children, who were divided into groups of light, medium, and dark skin tones, Clark and Clark found that the light skinned children identified with the white child's picture while the darker and medium children identified with the "Negro" child. From this, they concluded skin color is an important factor in the origination of consciousness of self and racial identification. Clark and Clark also stated instead of socially defined racial differences that light and dark children use the physical characteristic of skin color to formulate identifications; while medium complexioned children use other factors.<sup>2</sup>

Even though the 1939 study emanated the Clark's interest in children's racial identifications, their most noted study is in the field of children's racial preferences and identification. In 1947 the Clark and Clark investigated racial preferences of children using the Doll Test, a coloring test, a questionnaire, and a modification of the Horowitz line drawing technique.<sup>3</sup>

During this test, the subjects were shown four dolls

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<sup>2</sup>Kenneth Clark and Mamie Clark. "Skin Color as a Factor in Racial Identification of Negro Preschool Children." The Journal of Social Psychology 11, (1940): 159.

<sup>3</sup>Kenneth Clark and Mamie Clark. "Racial Identification and Preference in Negro Children." Readings in Social Psychology (1947): 169.

all of which were identical except for skin and hair color, two of the dolls were brown with black hair and two were white with yellow hair. For half of the subjects, the dolls were featured in the following sequences: White, Colored, White, Colored; for the other half the sequence was reversed. In the experiment the children were asked to respond to the questions by choosing a doll and handing it to the interviewer. The questions were designed to determine the children's racial preferences, their racial awareness and knowledge, and to assess the child's racial self identification.<sup>4</sup>

Over 70% of the children appropriately chose the white, black, or Negro dolls when asked, indicating there was a clear knowledge of "racial differences" and some awareness of the relationship between physical characteristics, skin color, and racial concepts, "White" and "Negro". Even though 66% of the children identified themselves with the colored doll, Clark and Clark concluded that realization of racial differences does not necessarily imply "a socially accurate racial self-identification."<sup>5</sup>

Questions which were designed to determine racial awareness and knowledge elicited more accurate responses from the darker children in comparison to the medium and

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 171.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 175.

lighter complexioned children. This accuracy signifies the "dark group" is more ordained in its knowledge of racial differences, its comprehension of the alternative labels for black, such as "Negro" or "Colored", and the dark group has a more concrete formulation of their own skin color. Based on racial preferences, the majority of the children were adamant in preferring the white doll, renouncing the colored doll, and implying negative attitudes toward the colored doll.<sup>6</sup>

Despite overall acceptance, many interpretive and methodological problems have been raised about the Clark and Clark study.<sup>7</sup> There are problems with the reliability and validity of the data. For example, it has not been shown that children's preferences are consistent over time or that their responses to the tasks represent future attitudes. Interpreting the importance of the racial cues in the child's judgement, and the effects the examiner's race may have on the child are other problems which were not considered in the study.<sup>8</sup>

The research by Hraba and Grant is an excellent example to illustrate the problems with the Clark and Clark study.

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 176.

<sup>7</sup>Phyllis A. Katz Sue R. Zalk. "Doll Preferences: An Index of Racial Attitudes?" The Journal of Educational Psychology 66, 5 (1974): 663.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 664.

In 1970 Hraba and Grant replicated the Clark and Clark study in order to re-examine the racial preferences of children. Like the Clark and Clark study, Hraba and Grant used four dolls, two white and two black, and the same set of questions. They used a sample consisting of 160 children, 89 black and 71 white, there was a white interviewer and a black interviewer.<sup>9</sup>

The racial preferences illustrated black and white children do prefer their own race and as they get older the preference increases. Analogous to the Clark and Clark study, Hraba and Grant classified the children into three categories: light (almost white), medium (light brown to dark brown), and dark (dark brown to black). Unlike the Clark and Clark children, both the darker and the lighter skinned children chose the darker skin complexions as the most desirable tones. The final contradiction between the two studies was the racial identification patterns of the children. As previously stated, there were questions designed to measure knowledge of racial differences. Parallel to the Clark and Clark study, there was no significant difference in the mis-identification among the black children by skin color; however, for the question pertaining to racial self-identification, 80% of the light

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<sup>9</sup>Joseph Hraba and Geoffrey Grant. "Black Is Beautiful: A Re-examination of Racial Preference and Identification." The Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 16, 3 (1970): 399.

skinned Clark and Clark children mis-identified themselves, while only 15% of the Hraba and Grant light skinned children mis-identified themselves.<sup>10</sup>

Researchers, Katz and Zalk, and Langlois and Stephan, addressed the notion that racial and other physical cues may influence the children's racial (doll) preference. Katz and Zalk state, even though the skin color of the dolls was the significant factor in the decision making process, other factors, such as eye and hair color, play a major role in the child's perception of the doll.<sup>11</sup> For example, in earlier studies, such as the Clark and Clark study, the Black dolls were presented with dark hair and dark eyes, while the white dolls, were presented with yellow hair and blue eyes. In the Katz and Zalk study, all of the dolls were presented in a identical manner, dark brown eyes and hair. Even though the children showed a preference for the white doll, similar results were obtained by the Clark and Clark study, it was concluded that these preference choices were made on the basis of physical characteristics not on skin color.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 400.

<sup>11</sup>Kenneth Clark and Mamie Clark. "Racial Identification and Preference in Negro Children." Readings in Social Psychology (1947): 172.

<sup>12</sup>Phyllis A. Katz and Sue R. Zalk. "Doll Preferences: An Index of Racial Attitudes?" Journal of Education Psychology 66, 5 (1974): 667.

A study by Langlois and Stephan also illustrates children are very judgmental concerning the physical characteristics of others, they have specific expectations about behaviors, and they make decisions which are primarily centered around reality, imaginative situations, and peer pressure.<sup>13</sup>

When children are shown stimulus pictures of attractive and unattractive people, the attitudes are more favorable toward the attractive person. In the same study, Langlois and Stephan found when examined, children of various ethnic backgrounds, including African American, rate the Black group of people as the unattractive group. This finding suggests that African American and other ethnic children have not only accepted and internalized negative societal stereotypes about African Americans, but express this acceptance by rejecting the Black groups when questioned about their racial preferences.<sup>14</sup>

Many studies conclude this rejection of Black dolls and other reference materials, may not be the result of internalized stereotypes, but an effort by the children to give a socially acceptable answer in order to please the

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<sup>13</sup>Judith H. Langlois and Cookie Stephan. "The Effects of Physical Attractiveness and Ethnicity on Children's Behavioral Attributions and Peer Preferences." Child Development 48 (1977): 1697.

<sup>14</sup>Linda A. Teplin. "Preference Versus Prejudice: A Multi-method Analysis of Children's Discrepant Racial Choices." Social Science Quarterly 58, 3 (December 1977): 405.



examiner.<sup>15</sup> The Katz and Zalk study shows doll selection may be biased toward the race of the examiner. Katz and Zalk administered the Doll Preference Task to 192 children to determine whether the race of the examiner does influence the child's racial preference and attitude. During this task, two black and two white dolls (one of each gender) were shown to the children. In order to accommodate for any methodological problems with the instruments, each doll was approximately 10 inches tall, with brown eyes, dark brown wigs with straight or coarse hair in order to signify race.<sup>16</sup>

The children were asked to choose the doll they liked best/did not like the best; the good/bad doll; the doll that was/was not a nice color; the doll they would want to take home; the doll that looked like him or her; the one who looked like a white/black child. The last three questions were asked in order to measure identification. Half of the subjects were tested by a white examiner, the other half by a black examiner. The results Katz and Zalk obtained were similar to those of the Clark and Clark study showing there was a strong preference for white dolls among black and

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<sup>15</sup>Joseph Hraba. "The Doll Technique: A Measure of Racial Ethnocentrism?" Social Forces 50 (June 1972): 526

<sup>16</sup>Phyllis A. Katz and Sue R. Zalk. "Doll Preferences: An Index of Racial Attitudes?" The Journal of Education Psychology 66, 5 (1974): 664.

white preschool children; but Katz and Zalk concluded these choices were influenced by the race of the examiner. A bivariate analysis (Race of the Examiner by Race of Subject) demonstrated when tested by an examiner of the same race, children select dolls of their own skin color for positive items and other race dolls for negative attributes. This preference tends to be more prevalent in white children, they show a preference for white dolls when tested by the white examiner but a preference for black dolls with the black examiner.<sup>17</sup>

Moore disagrees with the idea that doll selection is biased toward the race of the examiner. Moore administered a Preference Measure Test, a variation of the test Clark and Clark used in their study, to African American preschoolers.<sup>18</sup> During his study six examiners, 3 white, 3 black, showed six photographs of models, 3 black, 3 white, to the child. The white examiner placed the pictures in White-Black-White order and asked three questions to elicit the subject's positive perception of either the Black or White model; to ascertain the subject's negative perception of the Black or White model; and to determine the subject's racial preference. The Black examiner asked the same

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 667.

<sup>18</sup>Clifford L. Moore. "The Racial Preference and Attitude of Black Children." The Journal of Genetic Psychology 129 (1976): 37.

questions but arranged the pictures in Black-White-Black order.

Moore's findings revealed that at least half of the subjects perceived the white model more positively than the black model, indicating there is evidence showing that racial preferences and attitudes differ between males and females. Social attitudes did not differ between the males and females. The majority of the subjects perceived the black model negatively, males perceiving the black model more negatively than the white. Analysis revealed there was no significant difference between the male and female subjects, but more than half of the subjects preferred the black model.<sup>19</sup> Moore found no evidence supporting the race of the examiner may influence the children's choices of doll preference. This conclusion is also supported by Hraba and Grant.<sup>20</sup>

White preference behavior has been thought to be a means of defining of racial self-rejection in blacks. A negative concept of self is believed to be manifested in a tendency to express evaluative and self-identification preferences in white dolls, puppets, and other

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 43.

<sup>20</sup>Joseph Hraba and Geoffrey Grant. "Black Is Beautiful: A Re-examination of Racial Preference and Identification." The Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 16, 3 (1970): 401.

representations. A series of twenty-one studies was analyzed in order to evaluate white preference behavior through the choice frequencies of black subjects. Two studies support the hypothesis that black children do have a preference for white, four studies reject the hypothesis and illustrate that blacks have a preference for blacks, and fifteen studies conclude there are no preferences for black nor white.<sup>21</sup>

Choice preference research has been conducted not only to determine African-American's preference between Black and White skin complexions, but also for their choices among African-American's light and dark skin tones. A study by Hall researched African American first year college students in order to determine which skin tone was most desirable.<sup>22</sup> The Cutaneo-Chrome Correlate (CCC) was developed to determine skin tone preferences among the students. The instrument had three main tasks, to assess potential skin tone bias; to evaluate the respondent's ideals pertaining to skin color, and to self-rate ones own skin color. The skin tone scale for the instrument was 1=darkest, 2=dark,

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<sup>21</sup>W. Curtis Banks. "White Preference in Blacks: A Paradigm in Search of a Phenomenon." Psychological Bulletin 83, 6 (1976): 1179.

<sup>22</sup>Ronald Hall. "Bias Among African-Americans Regarding Skin Color: Implications for Social Work Practice." Research on Social Work Practice 2, 4 (October 1992): 479.

3=medium, 4=light, and 5=lightest. In scoring, the higher scores reflect greater value upon light skin, while the lower scores indicate a devaluation of dark skin.

Using the CCC, Hall concluded that lighter skinned African Americans value the lighter complexions. Hall explained the results of his study indicate that society's bias toward the ideal lighter skin has been instilled in African Americans to the extent that they, in turn, impose this bias upon members of their own racial group.<sup>23</sup>

Research has also indicated the "differentiation of skin color can still be a viable criterion for status."<sup>24</sup> Porter agrees and states for African American children, this differentiation is becoming a more noticeable personal characteristic, especially for intra-group acceptance and attitude.<sup>25</sup>

In order to illustrate how skin color does play an important role among children, Porter examined African American school age children to determine which skin tones were the most preferred. Similar to other studies, Porter

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 485.

<sup>24</sup>H. P. MCAdoo. "Transgenerational Patterns of Upward Mobility in African-American Families." Black Families (California: Sage Publications, 1988), 153.

<sup>25</sup>Cornelia P. Porter. "Social Reasons for Skin Tone Preferences of Black School-Age Children." American Journal of Orthopsychiatry 61, 1 (January 1991): 153.

also excluded the white skin tone from her sample of skin complexions; but in contrast to other studies, she presented the Skin Tone Connotation Scale, devised by a mixture of oil paints to assimilate real skin tones.

The subject's skin tones ranged from medium to honey brown. Each child was interviewed by a female with a brown skin tone. During the session, the interviewer orated a vignette with positive and/or negative connotations about a child then asked the subject questions pertaining to the desired skin tones of the children in the story.

In response to the questions, the children indicated that dark brown and very dark brown were the least desirable complexions for the subjects of the story, while ranges of brown (honey brown) to yellow (very light yellow) were the most preferred. Although there were distinct color preference choices throughout each age category, across all age groups, 56% of the girls and 64% of the boys selected the very dark brown as the least preferred tone. Porter concluded with this group of children skin tone is a very important personal characteristic. Over the years very little has changed with children's skin tone preferences, for example, regardless of one's age or gender honey brown continues to be the most preferred skin complexion while darker browns are the least.

Overall, research indicates children do have a

preference for particular skin complexions, although these preferences are developed based on various factors. Research also shows that African American children still associate dark skin tones with bad or negative connotations, and consider this skin color less desirable than the others.

### Theoretical Framework

As previously stated, among children skin color has become a determinant for intra-group acceptance and attitude. For years, researchers have investigated the racial attitudes of children, usually expressing more interest in the attitudes of African American children. In order to understand the reasons behind children's skin tone preferences one must realize the foundations of racial attitude development patterns children possess.

In order to learn about races, racial differences, identity, preferences and rejections, Goodman proposes the child must assimilate each part of the whole, while he acquires ideas about himself and the society in which he lives.<sup>26</sup> The steps to becoming racially aware consist of the child learning differences among racial categories, the child understanding the manner which perceptual cues are used to classify into these divisions, and the child utilizing opportunities to observe racial differences through actual interracial interaction or indirect

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<sup>26</sup>Judith Porter. Black Child, White Child: The Development of Racial Attitudes. (Massachusetts: Harvard Press, 1971), 13.

contact.<sup>27</sup> The development of racial awareness commences at this point.

According to Goodman racial awareness, orientation, and attitudes are the three key elements to developing racial attitudes. Although children complete these stages rather quickly, the process of developing racial attitudes will be continuous throughout childhood and integrated into ego-identity development.<sup>28</sup>

The first stage, racial awareness, is defined as the ability to discriminate persons of one group from another. The incipient attitude or racial orientation usually appears around the ages of 3 through 5 and is defined as the emergence of rudimentary feelings, positive or negative, about different racial groups. By the time children reach ages 7 through 9, they begin to develop true racial attitudes, attitudes which have been elaborated upon with more complex information and stereotyped notions.<sup>29</sup>

The above process is described in a very broad and general outline, however, it is lacking detail; therefore, a more elaborate theory regarding the formation of children's racial attitudes was developed. Developed by Katz, this new theory of children's racial attitude

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<sup>27</sup>Mary Ellen Goodman. Race Awareness in Young Children. (New York: Collier Books, 1952), 252.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 254.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 257.



development was not only more detailed and precise, but it also was more cognitively than socially oriented.<sup>30</sup> Instead of three stages, Katz states children move through eight stages of attitude development based upon their thinking processes. By the age of 3 years, there is observation of racial cues, such as skin color and hair; these observations can form initial concepts about blacks and other racial groups, including labels and evaluative information. Once these concepts are learned, they are reinforced through encounters of positive or negative instances. For instance, conceptual differentiation illustrates the child's ability to look at a light or a dark skinned person and associate the label "black", the child knows skin color is not necessarily equal to the racial label. The fourth stage the child will discover is the recognition of irrevocable cues. During this stage, the child learns that certain personal characteristics like size, age, and height can change; while others, race and sex, can not. Augmenting stages three and four will lead to consolidation of group concepts. By the time this point is reached, the child has the ability to identify and label positive or negative instances, and understand the permanence of (racial) group membership.<sup>31</sup>

Slowly the conceptual, incipient, attitudes slowly

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<sup>30</sup>David Milner. Children & Race. (California: Sage Publications, 1983), 106.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 107.

become racial, true, attitudes. During this phase, children use perceptual and cognitive processes to incorporate "us" and "them" groups. In other words, through observation and thinking, the child is able to determine differences in racial groups; "us" being the intra-group (the child is a member), and "them", the other group. There is an emphasis on differentiation between groups and the intra-group is less pronounced. In the final phase, the attitudes which have developed become stable and resistant to change according to the environment and circumstances surrounding them.

These theories presented a synthesis and overview of the stages which children follow in order to develop some sense of racial identification. Whether social or cognitively oriented, children will develop racial attitudes based upon physical cues of people and the attitudes of others about these people.

#### Statement of the Hypotheses

This research investigated the following hypotheses.

- Hypothesis 1: The children will correctly identify the skin complexions most similar to their own.
- Hypothesis 2: The children will not associate negatively phrased statements solely with the darker skin tones.
- Hypothesis 3: The children will choose the light skin complexion as the most preferred.
- Hypothesis 4: The self concept score of the light and dark skinned children will be similar.

### Operational Definitions

African American	An individual who at least one of the biological parents is of the racial category black; not according to skin color, but the physical attributes characteristic of the Negro race.
School Age Child	An individual who is between the ages of 5 and 11 years and currently enrolled in school
Self-Concept	The sum total of a person's perception, feeling, and beliefs about himself. This concept can be thought of as having two parts: characteristics and personality traits; the evaluation of the worth or desirability of the traits. <sup>32</sup> The Lipsett Self Concept Scale was used to measure self concept.
Skin Tone	Colors of light brown, almost white to yellow; medium brown, tan to medium brown; and dark brown, dark brown to black, which represent African American skin complexions. Skin tone was determined by the forearm.

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<sup>29</sup>Encyclopedia of Sociology. (Connecticut: Duschkin Publishing Group, Inc., 1974), 256.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

Children's skin tone preferences have been studied in several ways such as the Choice Preference, Doll Test, and Portrait Series Test. This descriptive study focuses upon skin tone preferences among African American school children. In this study, the Portrait Series method of determining skin preference was modified in order to determine whether there is a correlation between the children's skin tone and other dependent variables.

#### Sampling

The sampling technique used in this study was convenient sampling. Fifty African American school children participated in the study. The subjects were selected from the Sunday School classes of two community churches. One church was of the United Methodist denomination. It was located in the south side of Columbus, Georgia outside of an upper-middle status neighborhood. Its congregation was primarily composed of young African American adults. The other church is a Christian Methodist church located in Phenix City, Alabama. It is located in a low-income housing project. The congregation is comprised of an older population.

#### Instrumentation

There were two instruments administered to collect data for this study, a videotape accompanied by a questionnaire

and the Lipsett Self Concept Scale. The videotape was produced by the researcher in order to obtain children's skin tone preferences. The videotape consisted of two, one minute segments, each showing a group of skin complexions.

Each complexion and label was decided upon by a panel of five adults. In order to determine the skin complexions, the panel looked at the forearms of ten models. Each model was placed in descending order of skin complexions, darkest to lightest. The panel chose the three models which were most suitable for the chosen skin tones: light (almost white to yellow), medium (tan to medium brown), and dark (brown to dark brown or black).

Once the models were selected, they were arranged in medium, light, and dark order and videotaped, this color arrangement enabled the child to make distinctions between skin tones. As previously stated, there were two, one minute segments filmed for the presentation. The first segment showed the forearms of the models, the second segment showed the entire arm. The arm, instead of the face was used to represent skin color. This was done in order to eliminate the bias of beauty.

There was a Questionnaire Scale of eleven questions that accompanied the videotape. The first nine questions were designed to determine skin tone preference of children, the tenth question determined the child's ability for self identification, and question eleven determined if the child was satisfied with one's skin complexion.

The Lipsett Self Concept Scale was the second instrument used for data collection. This scale consists of twenty-two descriptive statements which are responded to on a five point scale, designed to measure children's feelings about themselves. The Lipsett Self Concept is usually used with ages twelve and above. According to Lipsett, the potential range for the scale was 22 to 110, higher scores representing high levels of self concept. There was no data on the internal consistency of the scale; however, a two week test-retest correlations ranged from .73 to .91, indicating good reliability. For validity, the Lipsett scale significantly correlates with scores of the Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale.<sup>1</sup>

#### Data Collection

Each church was sent a letter explaining the nature and purpose of the study and requesting permission to perform the study in the church. A parental permission form was also included. Each pastor was assured the names of the churches would not be disclosed.

Due to the fact that the researcher was the only person who knew which label was synonymous with which skin complexion, the researcher administered all instruments to each participant. Each session required an average of ten

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<sup>1</sup>Kevin Corcoran and Joel Fischer. Measures for Clinical Practice: A Sourcebook. (New York: Free Press, 1987): 410-411.

minutes to complete.

The subjects were individually called into the research room. They were informed that they were going to watch a videotape and answer question pertaining to the tape. It was also explained to the child, there were no incorrect responses. In order to answer the questions, the children were instructed to point to the skin tone which best answered the question. After each question was asked, the response was recorded by the labels A, B, and C, according to which arm was chosen. A rating of light skin was coded as "A" and given the scale value of "1"; the medium skin complexion was represented as "B" with the scale vale of "2"; "C" represented dark complexioned skin, "3" was the assigned value. Before the videotape was shown, demographic information such as the subject's number, age, gender, grade and skin color was recorded. Skin color was determined by ranking the complexion of the child's inner forearm according to the pre-determined scale.

The instructions for the Lipsett Self Concept Scale were explained to each participant. If the child was able to read the Lipsett Scale was self-administered, if the subject could not read, the researcher administered the test. In either case, it was emphasized to the subject, if there were any words the subject did not understand, they would be explained. At the conclusion of the research, the scores for each subject were calculated and recorded.

CHAPTER FOUR  
PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

Data Analysis

The findings of the study are presented in this chapter. The results represented are the mean scores of the questionnaire in relation to the children's skin tone preferences, identification processes, and self-concept level.

Table One illustrates the demographic characteristics of the subjects. There were fifty children who participated in this study, twenty-nine were females and twenty-one were males. The average age of the subjects was 8.3 years. The sample consisted of 10% kindergartners, 16% first graders, 14% second graders, 24% third graders, 20% fourth graders, 8% fifth graders, and 8% sixth graders.

The mean and standard deviation scores of the questionnaires were presented in Table Two. The scores were as follows: the mean was 1.9, s.d.=.76. Table Three indicates the means scores of the questionnaire by skin complexion of the subjects. The mean of the questionnaire was 1.82 (s.d.=.17). Table Four illustrates the distribution of skin complexions among subjects. Nine subjects were light complexioned, twenty-four were medium, and seventeen were dark complexioned.

Table Five presents the frequency of skin selection by skin tone and gender. As can be seen, the data illustrates



Table 1.--Frequency Distribution of Demographic  
Characteristics

<u>Variable</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
<u>Gender</u>		
Male	21	42
Female	29	58
<u>Age</u>		
5	3	6
6	8	16
7	6	12
8	8	16
9	11	22
10	7	14
11	7	14
<u>Grade</u>		
K	5	10
1	8	16
2	7	12
3	12	24
4	10	20
5	4	8
6	4	8
<u>Skin Complexion</u>		
Light	9	18
Medium	24	48
Dark	17	34

Table 2.--Mean and Standard Deviation Scores for the  
Questionnaire

	<u>Question</u>	<u>Mean Score</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>
1.	Show me the skin color of a pretty person	1.7	.73
2.	Show me the skin color of an ugly person	2.4	.86
3.	Show me the skin color of a good person	2.0	.67
4.	Show me the skin color of a bad person	2.2	.87
5.	Show me the skin color of a nice person	1.8	.78
6.	Show me the skin color of a mean person	2.0	.87
7.	Show me the skin color of a smart person	1.8	.69
8.	Show me the skin color of the person you want to play with	1.8	.71
9.	Show me the skin color you like	1.7	.68
Grand Mean		1.9	.76

Table 3.--Mean and Standard Deviations Scores of  
Questions by Skin Complexion

<u>Skin Complexion</u>	<u>Mean Score</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>
Light	1.75	.15
Medium	1.81	.13
Dark	1.89	.24
Grand Mean	1.82	.17

Table 4.--Distribution of Subject's Skin Complexions

<u>Skin Complexion</u>	<u>Gender</u>		<u>Total</u>	<u>Percent</u>
	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>		
	<u>N</u>	<u>N</u>		
Light	4	5	9	18.0
Medium	14	10	24	48.0
Dark	11	6	17	34.0
Total	29	21	50	100.0

Table 5.--Frequency of Selection by Skin Tone and Gender

<u>Skin Complexion</u>	<u>Most Preferred</u>				<u>Least Preferred</u>			
	Male		Female		Male		Female	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Light	8	38.1	15	51.7	7	33.3	8	27.6
Medium	10	46.6	11	38.0	6	28.6	5	17.2
Dark	3	14.3	3	10.3	8	38.1	15	51.7
No Answer	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	3.4

the lighter skin complexion was the most preferred among males and females. From this information, Hypothesis Three which states the light skin color will be the most preferred skin complexion among the children, is supported. Overall, 89.8% of the children chose the light skin as the most preferred skin complexion.

Hypothesis One stated the children will correctly identify the skin complexion most similar to their own. The data presented in Table Six showed that while 100% of the light skinned children, and 79.2% of the medium complexioned children identified themselves according to the researcher's categorization, only 47.1% of the dark complexioned children correctly identified themselves.

Table Seven, illustrates the mean scores which represent Hypothesis Two. The mean of 2.2 (s.d.=.87) indicated negatively phrased statements were not solely associated with the darker skin tones; indicating, the null hypothesis is supported.

The results of Tables Eight, Nine, and Ten reveal that there was only a slight difference between the subject's gender, skin complexion, age and their self concept scores. Table Eight illustrates females had a mean self concept score of 88.5 (s.d.=7.98), while the males had a score of 86.1 (s.d.=11.2).

Table Nine shows the light complexioned children had a mean concept score of 88.4 (s.d.=12.3), while the scores of

Table 6.--Distribution of Children Who Identified Their  
Skin Complexion

<u>Skin Complexion</u>	<u>Subject's Skin Complexion Categorized by Researcher</u>	<u>Subject's Who Were Able to Identify Own Skin Color</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Light	9	9	100.0
Medium	24	19	79.2
Dark	17	8	47.1

Table 7.--Mean and Standard Deviation Scores of Responses  
to Negatively Phrased Questions

<u>Question</u>	<u>Mean Score</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>
1. Show me the skin color of a ugly person	2.4	.86
2. Show me the skin color of an bad person	2.2	.87
3. Show me the skin color of a mean person	2.0	.87
Grand Mean	2.2	.87



Table 8.--Mean and Standard Deviations Scores of  
Self Concept Scores by Gender

<u>Gender</u>	<u>Self Concept Score</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>
Male	88.5	7.98
Female	86.1	11.20
Grand Mean	87.3	9.59

Table 9.--Mean and Standard Deviations Scores of  
Self Concept Scores by Skin Complexion

<u>Skin Complexion</u>	<u>Self Concept Score</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>
Light	88.4	12.30
Medium	86.6	9.06
Dark	88.2	8.38
Grand Mean	87.7	9.91

the medium and dark complexioned children were 86.6 (s.d.=9.06) and 88.2 (s.d.=8.38), respectively. The grand mean was 87.7, s.d.=9.91. Hypothesis Four, the self concept scores of the light and dark skinned children will be similar, was also supported.

Table Ten illustrates the self concept scores by the subject's age. The scores ranged from 90.3 for five year olds to 89.7 for eleven year olds. The group mean was 87.9.

Table 10.--Mean and Standard Deviations Scores of  
Self Concept Scores by Age

<u>Age</u>	<u>Self Concept Score</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>
5	90.3	8.81
6	90.9	7.66
7	90.8	11.20
8	87.3	8.00
9	85.8	8.50
10	80.3	10.60
11	89.7	7.36
Group Mean	87.9	8.87

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study revealed there are many variables which should be considered when assessing children's skin tone preferences and self identification processes. The children ranged from ages five through eleven, kindergarten through sixth grades. Based on the research, children as young as the age of 5 years can correctly distinguish between the various skin complexions and determine which complexion is closest to their own. In this study, age was not a correlating factor in determining children's skin preferences. Despite the fact research has indicated by an early age, children can distinguish between skin colors and do begin to develop preferences, this did not occur in this study. The light skin color was the most preferred throughout all ages, genders, and skin complexions.

The results showed that negatively phrased statements were not solely associated with the dark skin tones. This may be the result of the positive messages which are constantly being instilled in our children, primarily through parents, literature, agencies such as school, and peers.<sup>1</sup> Occasionally, the child would be asked why a particular skin color was chosen. Even though most of the

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<sup>1</sup>Kenneth B. Clark and Mamie Clark. "What Do Blacks Think of Themselves?" Ebony (November, 1980): 180.

light skin females felt there were no "ugly" colors, they stated they chose the light skin as the most preferred because it was "prettier" than the rest; it was pretty because that was the lightest color; and occasionally, it was pretty because "it was white."

The light and the dark skinned children had almost equivalent self concept scores. All of the subjects, except one, responded they liked the skin color they were and would not change it. The only child who was not satisfied with his complexion, stated he was of an interracial marriage, and he was not a color, he was "mixed up". Coincidentally, this child also had the lowest self concept score (60) of all of the subjects. There was also one child who was not able to respond to all of the questions.

#### Limitations of the Study

Even though this study was successful in attaining the skin complexion which was the most preferred among African American children there are limitations to the study. First, the sample group was confined to the children who attended the Sunday School class which was held that day. Although this setting was appropriate for the purpose of the study, no generalizations regarding these findings can be made beyond this particular population. Another limitation, dealt with the two types of instruments used. The videotape accurately depicted various skin complexions, but only three colors were shown. This posed a problem when the children

were asked to identify the skin color which was most similar to his/her own. Most children stated they belonged to one of the three designated skin categories, but there were several children who had difficulty choosing a category. This could have been eliminated through the addition of more skin colors, such as colors which came in between the three primary complexions. For example, there should have been a skin tone which could represent a child whose complexion was medium-dark.

#### Suggested Research Directions

There should be more research done in order to have a better understanding of the effect skin tone bias can have upon children. Most of the existing research on skin tone preferences and self identification have been on African American children ages three to twelve, as a result, very little information is known about the preferences of adolescents and adults. Programs should be implemented which study this populations preferences and their self concept levels.

Aside from research programs, educational based curricula can be implemented in the schools which assist in enhancing self concept levels of African American children while preventing any skin tone bias which may later develop. Recreational activities, such as dolls and other toys, can also be a factor which teach children the beauty of various skin complexions. Instead of dolls being

produced in two colors, black and white, dolls which depict African Americans can be produced in various shades of browns. This can instill in children there are various shades of African American people all of which are beautiful, and began to eliminate any bias which may later develop about different skin tones.

#### Implications for Social Work Practice

Although virtually unexplored in the field of social work, skin tone bias among African-Americans has become a serious psycho-social phenomenon which deserves much attention.<sup>1</sup> These biases may affect the most important elements of mental health, self esteem and self concept. Addressing these biases is the goal for social workers and other professionals.

The effects of skin tone bias may be manifested in self esteem and self concept by means of social problems, such as teenage pregnancy, drug abuse, and gang violence.<sup>2</sup> These problems may be the result of unresolved conflicts of skin color issues in a color biased African American society. Schools, mental health agencies, and other professionals are not sufficiently prepared to help African American clients who suffer from these unresolved skin tone issues.

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<sup>1</sup>Ronald Hall. "Bias among African Americans Regarding Skin Color: Implications for Social Work Practice." Research Social Work Practice. 2, 4 (October 1992): 485.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 485.



The primary goal of social workers who work with these African Americans clients should be to address the issues of self esteem and concept. Programs which target African American children, should be developed and implemented in schools and other social agencies, which will not only teach the children but enhance their self esteem and concept. Before programs can be developed, there must be changes in social work training programs and social workers. For example, just as white social workers are extensively taught how to work with African Americans and other ethnic groups, African American social workers need similar education. These African American social workers need to understand the issues in which there clients are dealing.<sup>3</sup>

Even in private practice settings, social workers must learn to deal with skin tone issues. In society, lighter skinned black human service professionals are sought for assistance more than the darker professionals. With this in mind, these lighter skinned professionals may unknowingly be biased against their darker clients, seeing the darker skin as a societal disadvantage instead of an aspect of the person.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Betty Newton and Miguel Arciniega. "Group Counseling: Cross-Cultural Considerations." Introduction to Group Counseling. ed. David Capuzzi and Douglas Gross. (Colorado: Love Press, 1992), 497.

<sup>4</sup>Ronald Hall. "Bias Among African Americans Regarding Skin Color: Implications for Social Work Practice." Research on Social Work Practice. 2, 4 (October 1992): 485.

While there is no simple answer or solution to this situation, basic steps may be taken. As previously stated, social workers can develop programs which address the conflicts African Americans are facing concerning their skin complexions. Through education, social workers may help professionals to deal with these unknown biases by making them more culturally aware of their own race and history and helping them to address their own values, beliefs, personal strengths, deficits and prejudices.<sup>5</sup> This method of education will not only be beneficial in helping the professional understand the skin tone issues which are constantly disturbing to the client, but the professional can also help to build and enhance the client's self esteem and concept levels, while changing the professional's view about himself.

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 485.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

Ms. Erica L. Bernard  
700 Beckwith Street  
Room 208  
Atlanta, Georgia 30314  
March 1, 1993

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Erica L. Bernard, I am a second year graduate student at Clark Atlanta University majoring in Clinical Social Work with a concentration in health/mental health. In order to fulfill my thesis requirements for graduation, I have chosen to research skin tone preferences among African American school age children.

The purpose of this study is to determine which skin tones African American children prefer and if these preferences have a direct correlation with the child's self-concept level. Once the study is completed, I hope to ascertain that over the years, the values we, African Americans, have attempted to instill in our children about the beauty of various Black skin complexions have been adopted.

During this study, I will be observing and recording children's responses to a videotape which shows three skin tones of African-Americans. The experiment will last approximately ten (10) minutes. If possible I would like to administer it during the Sunday School class hour.

A complete copy of my thesis will be available upon completion. If I have failed to address any other issues or if you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact me, 221-5593; or my thesis advisor, Dr. Melvin Williams, 880-8088.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Erica L. Bernard

elb

enclosures

## APPENDIX B

March 1, 1993

Dear Parents/Guardians:

My name is Erica Bernard, I am a graduate student at Clark-Atlanta University. For my graduate thesis, I have chosen to replicate a study done by Dr. Cornelia P. Porter researching the skin tone preferences among African-American school aged children. During this study, I will be observing and recording your child's responses to a videotape showing three skin tones of African-Americans.

Once the study is completed, I hope to ascertain that over the years, the values we, African Americans, have attempted to instill in our children about the beauty of various Black skin complexions have been adopted.

The experiment will last approximately ten (10) minutes and will be administered during your child's Sunday School class time. The results of the experiment can be obtained from your minister in about four weeks.

Please complete the attached consent form and return it with your child as soon as possible. Hopefully this will be an exciting and educational experience for your child. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Erica L. Bernard

elb

\_\_\_\_\_ I give my permission for my child to participate in the study.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do **not** give my permission for my child to participate in the study.

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Signature of the Parent

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Date

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Child's Name

APPENDIX C  
QUESTIONNAIRE

Subject Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
Subject's Skin Tone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Subject's Gender: \_\_\_\_\_  
Subject's Age: \_\_\_\_\_  
Subject's Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

Instruct the child to point to the skin tone which he/she thinks completes the statement. Use the following scale to represent the skin tones the child chooses.

A= LIGHT SKIN TONE  
B= MEDIUM SKIN TONE  
C= DARK SKIN TONE.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Show me the skin color of a pretty person:
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Show me the skin color of a ugly person:
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Show me the skin color of a good person:
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Show me the skin color of a bad person:
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Show me the skin color of a nice person:
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Show me the skin color of a mean person:
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Show me the skin color of a mean person:
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Show me the skin color of a smart person:
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Show me the skin color of a person you want to play with.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Show me the skin color you like.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Show me the skin color that looks like yours:
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. Do you like your skin color?  
(If the answer is "no", ask why)

## APPENDIX D

## LIPSETT SELF CONCEPT SCALE

1= not at all

2= not very often

3= some of the time

4= most of the time

5= all of the time

- |                         |                           |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. ____ I am friendly   | 12. ____ I am cooperative |
| 2. ____ I am happy      | 13. ____ I am cheerful    |
| 3. ____ I am kind       | 14. ____ I am thoughtful  |
| 4. ____ I am brave      | 15. ____ I am popular     |
| 5. ____ I am honest     | 16. ____ I am courteous   |
| 6. ____ I am likeable   | 17. ____ I am jealous     |
| 7. ____ I am frustrated | 18. ____ I am obedient    |
| 8. ____ I am good       | 19. ____ I am polite      |
| 9. ____ I am proud      | 20. ____ I am bashful     |
| 10. ____ I am lazy      | 21. ____ I am clean       |
| 11. ____ I am loyal     | 22. ____ I am helpful     |

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